United Nations CEDAW/C/SR.1321

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
27 July 2015

English only

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-first session

Summary record of the 1321st meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 16 July 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Hayashi

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Namibia

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of the present document* to the English Translation Section, room E.6040, Palais des Nations, Geneva (trad_sec_eng@unog.ch).

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings held during this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.15-12377 (E) 240715 270715

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Namibia (CEDAW/C/NAM/4-5; CEDAW/C/NAM/Q/4-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Namibia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia), introducing the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Namibia (CEDAW/C/NAM/4-5), said that the Government acknowledged the existence of harmful cultural practices within society, which was why Namibia recognized only those aspects of customary law that were in compliance with the national Constitution. Law reform was a very lengthy process involving research, law-making and consultation with all relevant stakeholders. Namibia faced a number of challenges in that respect due to high staff turnover, the increased number of legislative bills, and research that was not conducted in a timely manner. As far as gender equality programmes were concerned, the Government had introduced a new 12-pronged National Gender Policy (2010-2020), together with a national Coordination Mechanism to ensure effective implementation of the policy, with the full involvement of all stakeholders.

3. As for the participation of women in politics and decision-making, the 2014 national elections had seen an increase in the number of women elected to Parliament as a result of amendments to the Constitution which focused on achieving greater female representation. That achievement was due to the commitment of the ruling party and civil society organizations and met the requirements of the Protocol on Gender and Development of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which called for at least 50 per cent representation of women in political and decision-making positions by 2015. Of the 25 ministers in the Namibian Cabinet, 7 were women, including the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. As part of the induction process for new female members of Parliament, a seminar was organized on enhancing their effective participation in national politics. Its aims included coaching in the skills required for leadership and decision-making positions, facilitating a platform for women in such positions to network and support one another, inculcating basic concepts in relation to gender mainstreaming, and familiarizing them with important international, regional and national legal instruments pertaining to gender equality and women's empowerment.

4. With regard to gender-based violence (GBV), the Government had collaborated with key stakeholders and development partners to relaunch a zero-tolerance media campaign in July 2015. Another initiative involved raising awareness of gender-based violence among men with the help of key stakeholders, such as men's organizations. For that purpose, meetings were held nationwide for and by men to advocate respect for the rights and dignity of women.

5. With regard to education, the National Conference on Education held in 2011 had adopted a resolution on free and compulsory primary education which had entered into force from January 2012. As from 2016, the Government would offer tuition-free secondary education, and waive fees for hostel accommodation at primary and secondary education levels and fees for national examinations. Discussions were under way to offer tuition-free enrolment at the Namibia College of Open Learning for young persons retaking grades 10 and 12.

6. Furthermore, as a direct result of the National Conference on Education, life skills teachers had been appointed at schools. Life skills teaching focused on such matters as gender, sex, gender-based violence, responsible parenthood and date rape. The Ministry of Education was also working on the development of a National Safe School Framework in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund, which would address such issues as harassment, violence and bullying in order to enhance the safety and well-being of school pupils.

Articles 1 to 6

7. **Ms. Patten** said that she was concerned by the slow pace of the law reform process. The number of bills enacted into law had not advanced and, given that the Convention legally obliged States parties to enact legislation that would offer legal protection to women, she wondered whether Namibia had the political will to follow through on its commitments. For example, legislation on divorce, customary marriage and inheritance had not yet been enacted despite having been under consideration by the Law Reform and Development Commission for a significant period of time.

8. As far as the visibility of the Convention was concerned, she enquired whether the Government had conducted awareness-raising campaigns for the benefit of the general public and key stakeholders, such as the media, the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, whether the Convention was cited in court judgements, and whether stakeholders received training on the Convention. The accessibility of judicial mechanisms to all women was compromised by budgetary cuts affecting legal aid. In addition, divorce cases were only heard in the high courts, making it almost impossible for women to receive free legal aid. She wondered whether the Government planned to establish mobile courts in rural areas, to provide a clear definition of discrimination against women in legislation, and to include HIV/AIDS status as possible grounds for discrimination under the Constitution.

9. **Ms. Gabr**, noted that the Gender Commission had been replaced by the Coordination Mechanism for the implementation of the National Gender Policy, said that she would appreciate information on the reasons for and practical significance of that change and on the relationship between the Coordination Mechanism and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. She also asked who was responsible for proposing, implementing and monitoring the National Gender Policy, and whether networking and coordination were taking place in that regard. She also wished to know which entity bore responsibility for the budget for women's affairs, what was the role of the gender focal points and how the Government cooperated with civil society organizations in the field of gender equality. Finally, she would appreciate a comment on how the Government helped women living in rural areas and poorer women to access justice, and whether there was the political will to provide more shelters for victims of gender-based violence.

10. **Ms. Gawanas** (Namibia) said that law reform was a very lengthy process, particularly where family and social issues were concerned. Citizen ownership of the process was essential. The Child Care and Protection Bill had been passed while the Bill on the Recognition of Customary Marriages was currently being discussed with traditional leaders. Having a legal system that encompassed both statutory common law and customary law inevitably had consequences for the status of women in society but customary law could not be changed overnight and, therefore, extensive consultation was required. Other bills, such as the Marital Property Bill and Divorce Bill, had been sent to Parliament for consideration but had been referred back to the Cabinet for further consultation.

11. With regard to the question on the political will to domesticate the Convention, she said that Namibia was committed to the enactment of important bills, in particular

the Divorce Bill. Divorce was currently a very costly process, so reforms were needed to ensure that women had access to justice. Moreover, the Convention had been referred to in one court decision in the case of *Müller v. President of the Republic of Namibia & Another* 1999.

12. **Mr. Shipoh** (Namibia) said that regional courts had been put in place to ensure access to justice. Judges were sent to various regions of Namibia, not just the capital city, in order to deliver judgements in as timely a manner as possible. Efforts had been made to ensure that all citizens, including members of the judiciary, received training on the rights available to them in order to encourage the reporting of offences. Furthermore, the Government had implemented special protection measures for victims of violence whereby their cases were heard in special courts so that they did not experience any humiliation, intimidation, or fear of reprisals.

13. All stakeholders were responsible for implementing the National Gender Policy, including traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and government institutions. Coordination was carried out across all government institutions and gender focal points were responsible for gender-responsive budgeting. According to a resolution passed by the Cabinet, all State institutions must budget for gender programmes and policies.

14. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that she had attended a workshop on gender-responsive budgeting and mainstreaming targeted at officials working within the Ministry of Defence and within law enforcement agencies.

15. **Ms. Patten** said that she would appreciate additional information on the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare's involvement in efforts to enact long-mooted laws and legal reforms relating to the advancement of women. She asked whether the only bills subject to long delays were those that addressed women's issues. She also asked what impact the cuts to the budget for free legal aid had had and whether it was currently possible to file for divorce in regional courts. She was still awaiting a reply to her question about the State party's failure to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of a person's HIV status.

16. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would appreciate specific information on the national machinery for the advancement of women and on its relationship with other stakeholders, including civil society organizations and the country's gender focal points.

17. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, urged the State party to approve the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention. She understood that the Human Rights Council had found that Namibia had violated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in a case involving discrimination and asked how the Namibian authorities had followed up on the Council's recommendation. Since the Committee had not received any individual communications involving Namibia, she wondered whether the general public was truly being made aware of the Convention and the Optional Protocol and, if so, how.

18. **Ms. Gawanas** (Namibia) said that she had been among the first members of the Law Reform and Development Commission, a subcommittee of which had worked specifically to enact a number of gender-related laws. The process of legal reform was initiated by the commission after consultation with members of the public; individual ministries could also propose bills. Drafting proposed legislation took a considerable amount of time, and the lawmakers of Namibia had to deal with scores of bills a year, a number that strained their relatively limited capacity.

19. In 2014, the Chief Justice had set in motion what was referred to as "court-connected mediation", an initiative that had greatly reduced costs and shortened the

length of proceedings associated with divorce cases. She was certain that if a person was subjected to discrimination on the basis of his or her HIV status, the courts, in accordance with the Namibian Bill of Rights, would rule in his or her favour, even though Namibian law did not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of HIV status. In the same connection, Namibia had recently abolished the rule preventing people living with HIV/AIDS from entering the country.

20. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare worked with various stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public agencies, traditional authorities and development partners, to develop policies on gender equality. Those policies could therefore cover a wide range of areas, from trade and economic development to reproductive health and peacebuilding. To increase their chances of being implemented, related policies had been grouped into one of six clusters, and each cluster was overseen by the competent commission or ministry. The cluster of health-related gender equality policies, for example, was overseen by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Although the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare did not have the requisite capacity in every necessary area of expertise, and therefore had to seek it elsewhere, it remained the driving force behind the implementation of gender equality policy.

21. Officials from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare had also received training in how to help officials from other ministries, in particular those responsible for the six clusters of gender equality policies, to take a gender-sensitive approach to the budgets they proposed. In 2014, a circular on how to develop gender-responsive budgets had been issued to every ministry. A second such circular was planned for 2015, as was an assessment of how the first one had been received.

22. **Mr. Shipoh** (Namibia) said that by law Namibia was required to provide legal aid to persons lacking the means to hire their own lawyers, even if they were suing the State. The Directorate of Legal Aid was responsible for administering the funds made available to pay lawyers for persons without income, including those seeking a divorce. Universities had free legal aid clinics staffed by law students.

23. Awareness-raising campaigns had increased the visibility of the Convention, the Optional Protocol and relevant laws. In addition, a simplified version of the Convention had been translated into the local languages.

24. **Ms. Patten** said that the State party's report had noted that the high cost and inaccessibility of the current system meant that some people might be unable to access a divorce, or that the financially weaker spouse (often the woman) might not be able to protect her interests. She wished to know how the provision of legal aid had changed since 2013, when the report had been received. Information on the numbers of women who had obtained legal aid would be welcome.

25. **Mr. Shipoh** (Namibia) said that anyone with an income of less than 1,000 Namibia dollars a month was entitled to legal aid. Written information on the numbers of women who had received legal aid would be provided in due course.

26. **Ms. Hofmeister** said that States parties did not always understand the concept of temporary special measures, which they had an obligation to adopt in order to achieve de facto equality between men and women. General recommendation No. 25 on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention (Temporary special measures) provided the necessary guidance.

27. In the areas of health care and education in particular, the problems facing the State party, including the forced sterilization of women with HIV/AIDS, unsafe abortions, harmful traditional practices and overtaxed health-care facilities, required immediate attention. In that connection, she asked what the State party was doing to

accelerate progress towards equality of outcome, combat sexual violence, enforce statutory quotas in an attempt to reach parity between men and women in all areas of political and economic life, and improve health-care standards. Lastly, she asked what temporary special measures had been taken to afford immediate protection to girls.

28. **Ms. Chalal** asked whether the media, NGOs and traditional community and religious leaders would be called upon to play greater roles in combating deep-seated stereotypes about the place of women in social life. She wished to know whether the study to assess the impact of the Traditional Authorities Act, which had granted those authorities the power to enforce customary law, and the Community Courts Act, some of whose provisions were likely to have an adverse impact on women, had been completed and, if so, what its conclusions had been. Information on the penalties incurred by the instigators of such traditional practices as sexual initiation rites and child marriage would be welcome. Lastly, she said that she would appreciate knowing exactly how the media and traditional and religious leaders viewed gender-based violence, how they helped the State combat sexist stereotypes and how large the budget for those activities was.

29. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that she wished to know whether the resources that the State party had at its disposal to combat gender-based violence countrywide would enable it to expand the range of services offered to victims and do research into the root causes of that violence. She asked what mechanisms had been put in place in an attempt to change attitudes towards traditional practices that were not always compatible with domestic law and whether there were any venues for the discussion of that issue. She wondered whether an interministerial committee on gender-based violence, established in 2008, still met; whether Act No. 8 of 2000 had been amended; whether the results of an evaluation of Act No. 4 of 2003 had been taken into account; whether women were still withdrawing their complaints against perpetrators of gender-based violence in increasing numbers; whether that deplorable trend was the result of community pressure; whether out-of-court settlements that promoted impunity were still the rule; and whether there was a policy on empowering young women to affirm their rights and their personal inviolability.

30. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to know what progress the State party had made on its anti-trafficking bill, how potential trafficking victims were identified, what referral protocols had been established for them and how the authorities intended to address the problems faced by shelters and safe houses, which were apparently understaffed and underequipped. She would welcome further information on the role of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare as the lead agency for efforts to combat human trafficking and on the authorities' plans to address trafficking more comprehensively, in particular in light of the State party's recent placement on the Tier 2 Watch List drawn up by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons of the United States Department of State.

31. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that the Government of Namibia was fully committed to fulfilling the obligations that it had incurred under the Convention provided that they were compatible with the Constitution. The anti-trafficking bill was currently in the final stages of preparation and, after some final improvements had been made, it would be sent to Parliament for adoption. A number of campaigns to raise awareness of human trafficking had also been conducted by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. The existence of the anti-trafficking bill attested to the country's political will to combat that phenomenon. Once the bill had been finalized and adopted, the Government hoped that the country would be removed from the Tier 2 Watch list of the United States Department of State.

32. The Traditional Authorities Act served to make traditional leaders aware of the dangers associated with certain harmful traditional practices. The Community Courts

Act was also a sign of the Government's ongoing commitment to eradicating traditional and cultural practices that were harmful to women. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare had also conducted awareness-raising campaigns to that end. In the past, some harmful traditional practices could have been attributed to a lack of access to medical care and to a lack of medical knowledge among persons living in traditional communities. However, those practices were becoming less prevalent over time.

33. **Mr. Shipoh** (Namibia) confirmed that the anti-trafficking bill was in the final stages of preparation and would be adopted by Parliament in 2015. The bill had been the subject of consultations with all relevant stakeholders, who had been able to provide input. In addition to the national baseline study on human trafficking, a further study on the female victims of human trafficking had been conducted. The results of that research would soon be made available to the general public. The Ministry of Finance had been instructed to allocate funding for the setting up of additional protection units in border areas to accommodate victims of human trafficking while the relevant investigations were conducted. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare provided training on issues relating to human trafficking in partnership with civil society. Law enforcement officers, judges and prosecutors were trained to recognize victims of human trafficking and the different fronts for that phenomenon, including sham marriages and scholarship programmes. The media played an important role in raising public awareness of human trafficking and gender-based violence. Churches also contributed to that endeavour.

34. **Ms. Kahikuata** (Namibia) said that schools ran clubs where girls learned about issues such as self-esteem. Moreover, a programme had been launched to draw attention to and ease the plight of the large number of schoolgirls who were forced to miss school each month on account of inadequate toilet or washing facilities and insufficient access to sanitary towels. An initiative to encourage schoolgirls who had fallen pregnant to return to school and to complete their studies had also been launched. The Namibian children's parliament provided children with an opportunity to meet and discuss issues of concern to them. There were quotas in place to ensure the equal representation of boys, girls and children with disabilities. Gender parity had already been achieved in schools and the enrolment rate of girls was currently higher than that of boys.

35. **Ms. Gawanas** (Namibia) said that temporary special measures, collectively known as "affirmative action", were provided for in the Constitution and had been introduced shortly after the country had gained independence. The main purpose of those temporary measures was to ensure the inclusion of the segments of society that had been historically excluded on the basis of race, gender or other grounds. Temporary special measures had been introduced with a view to achieving gender parity within the public service. However, many male public servants were opposed to the introduction of such measures on the ground that they could preclude the recruitment of better-qualified male candidates. It had been made clear to those public servants that achieving de facto equality between men and women was just as important as achieving de jure equality. The Government also needed to take steps to increase the quality and availability of maternal and infant health care.

36. Customary law was recognized provided that it did not conflict with the Constitution. Therefore, any traditional or cultural practice that was incompatible with constitutional principles was unlawful. However, as customary law was not written, it was difficult to challenge in court. The Traditional Authorities Act emphasized the primacy of the Constitution over customary law. The Government had identified a general lack of awareness among women of their rights, how to assert them and how to proceed when they were violated, and recognized the role of older women in

perpetuating harmful traditional practices. The Government was taking a number of steps to remedy that situation. It was necessary to conduct more research on the prevalence of harmful traditional and cultural practices in Namibia to find appropriate solutions.

37. Namibia was a signatory to the Maputo Plan of Action for the Operationalisation of the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights 2007-2010 and other continental instruments which safeguarded the rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS. The Namibian legal system was independent and could deal with human rights violations effectively and, if required, hold the Government to account. There was a pressing need to adopt guidelines for the treatment of women in the health-care system and to provide training to health-care professionals working with expectant mothers, as cases of abuse had been reported in the past.

38. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that the Government had recently decided to provide maternal health care free of charge.

39. **Ms. Mbombo** (Namibia) said that the Child Care and Protection Bill included child victims of trafficking as one of the categories of children who could be in need of protective services and who should be referred to a social worker for assessment. However, the Government was still in the process of drafting specific guidelines for dealing with cases of trafficking in children. The national action plan to combat gender-based violence was currently being implemented. A mid-term review of the action plan had been carried out in 2014 and its findings had been made available to the general public. Cabinet had held a special session at which it had adopted a number of guidelines for the judiciary and the education sector on gender-based violence. Moreover, a second national conference on gender-based violence had taken place in July 2014 at which several recommendations had been adopted.

40. The interministerial committee on gender-based violence lacked a clear mandate and the necessary authority to take decisions. The Coordination Mechanism for the implementation of the National Gender Policy had replaced the Gender Commission as the country's national machinery for the advancement of women. The areas of concern of the National Gender Policy had been grouped into six clusters, one of which was gender-based violence and human rights. Under that cluster, various activities to raise awareness of and combat gender-based violence had been carried out in cooperation with key stakeholders. The Coordination Mechanism requested key stakeholders to inform it of their priorities and of the nature of their activities from year to year, in order to prevent duplication of efforts and ensure that all areas of concern relating to gender-based violence were covered. The national action plan provided for measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, as well as a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the action plan's effectiveness.

41. Programmes to combat gender-based violence were currently underfunded in Namibia. A high-level meeting would be held in late 2015 to discuss increasing the funding allocated to such activities and to research and data collection in particular. The Government acknowledged that it needed to collect more data on gender-based violence and human trafficking from key stakeholders in order to provide the Committee with a clearer picture of the prevalence of those phenomena in the country.

42. **Ms. Böhlke-Möller** (Namibia) said that the temporary special measures introduced shortly after Namibia had gained independence had afforded a number of women access to high-ranking ministerial positions. Since the elections held in 2014, the level of female representation in Parliament had risen from 25 per cent to 47 per cent. There were currently 20 male ministers and 6 female ministers in Government. Around 15 per cent of judges and 45 per cent of magistrates were women.

43. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that temporary special measures had also been used to empower female domestic workers. A minimum wage for domestic workers had now been fixed and a trade union for domestic workers had also been set up. Domestic workers also paid taxes and had access to medical care.

44. **Ms. Patten** said that she welcomed the progress made towards adopting the anti-trafficking bill. She asked whether the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare had considered devising a national action plan to implement the Committee's previous recommendations; whether it planned to conduct research to ascertain the prevalence of harmful traditional and cultural practices so as to direct its efforts more effectively; and what steps it had taken to draw the attention of older women to the dangers associated with perpetuating such practices.

45. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** asked whether the Combating of Rape Act (Act No. 8 of 2000), particularly article 3, thereof, had been revised pursuant to the recommendations referred to in paragraph 10 of the list of issues (CEDAW/C/NAM/Q/4-5). The State party should explain why victims of domestic violence often withdrew their complaints. Were they pressured to do so by their communities? Did out-of-court settlements enable perpetrators to go unpunished?

46. **Ms. Haidar** said that the Committee would appreciate receiving written input on the child trafficking provisions contained in the recently adopted Child Care and Protection Act.

47. **Ms. Chalal** said that she had not yet received an answer to her question as to whether the Government had conducted a study to assess the impact of the Traditional Authorities Act.

48. **Ms. Mbombo** (Namibia) said that chapter 14 of the Combating of Rape Act (Act No. 8 of 2000) was devoted to child trafficking and that she would provide the Committee with a copy or summary of that chapter.

49. The issue of complaint withdrawals had been discussed at the second National Conference on Gender-Based Violence. On the basis of those discussions, it had been recommended that prosecution rates should be increased and that the Office of the Prosecutor-General should implement measures to ensure that complaints were not withdrawn. Prosecutors were now immediately assigned to cases, which helped to ensure that trials were conducted in a timely manner and that perpetrators were brought to justice. The Office of the Prosecutor-General had also introduced specialized units to deal with cases of gender-based violence, as well as victim-friendly courts in which victims did not have to face their attackers.

50. One of the main reasons why victims of domestic violence withdrew their complaints was that, more often than not, the perpetrator was the breadwinner and supported the victim and her family. The Office of the Prosecutor-General was therefore exploring the possibility of establishing a fund that could provide support to victims in cases where the perpetrator was the breadwinner. Furthermore, the Women and Child Protection Units had been renamed Gender-based Violence Investigating Units to encourage male victims of violence to come forward with complaints.

51. In response to a question from Ms. Patten, she said that Namibia would consider adopting a national plan on the implementation of the Committee's concluding observations.

52. **Ms. Gawanas** (Namibia) said that the Government had not conducted a study to assess the impact of the Traditional Authorities Act or any research on the prevalence of harmful traditional practices, but intended to do so in the future. In the meantime, the Government would collate any data on harmful traditional practices that had already been assembled by individual organizations.

53. In response to a question from Ms. Patten, she said that awareness-raising campaigns targeted all women. Inter-generational discussions between young and older women should be encouraged, and a proposal had been made to hold a conference on traditional practices in relation to the Constitution.

54. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that, as the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, she often met with traditional authorities during their councils. She found it regrettable that those traditional authorities could not attend the State party's meetings with the Committee due to a lack of funding.

55. **Ms. Haidar** pointed out that the Committee's public meetings were broadcast on the Internet and that the traditional authorities could watch them online.

56. **The Chairperson** asked whether the Child Care and Protection Act had been gazetted.

57. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia) said that the former Child Care and Protection Bill was now an Act and must be implemented.

58. **Ms. Mbombo** (Namibia) said that she could provide the Committee with a copy of the Gazette that contained the Act.

Articles 7 to 9

59. **Ms. Nwankwo** commended the Government on its commitment to achieving gender parity in the National Assembly, but expressed concern that gender parity might not continue should a less gender-friendly political party come to power. Was the Government considering incorporating gender parity into the Electoral Act to ensure that it was mandatory? She asked what steps the Government was taking to increase the representation of women in local government and in higher courts such as the Supreme Court. Were there any plans to appoint more women as ambassadors or high commissioners?

60. **Ms. Gbedemah** welcomed the fact that article 4 of the Constitution granted women equal rights with respect to the nationality of their children. Nevertheless, according to the State party's report, birth registrations were often delayed due to the absence of the child's father. She asked what percentage of children were affected by such delays and enquired about the average length of those delays. The State party should describe the impact of awareness-raising campaigns on birth registration.

61. **Ms. Sioka** (Namibia), in response to Ms. Nwankwo's question about providing for gender parity in the Electoral Act, said that the Government had considered amending the Electoral Act and using a quota system, but was waiting for the political parties to amend their constitutions. Consultations on the matter had begun, and some political parties seemed open to the use of quotas. Gender parity had not yet been achieved, but the Government expected to see more women elected in the forthcoming regional and local elections, on the basis of "zebra-style" party lists.

62. **Ms. Gawanas** (Namibia) agreed that amending the Electoral Act was the only way to ensure gender parity in the future, but said that the Government faced obstacles in that regard. With regard to the lack of female judges in higher courts, she said that part of the problem was that women had not been able to study the law prior to the country's independence. The Government was nevertheless trying to recruit more women to the judiciary.

63. **Ms. Mbombo** (Namibia) said that female representation in the public sector had improved due to affirmative action. The Government needed a system that would allow it to collect reliable data on the private sector, so that it would have a clearer picture of women's participation and be able to implement more effective strategies.

64. In response to a question from Ms. Gbedemah, she said that either parent could register the birth of a child; however, the child must be registered in the name of the registering parent. A mother could therefore register her child under her own name, but that was culturally and socially unacceptable, as it gave the impression that the maternal grandfather was the father. The Government must raise awareness of the fact that it was possible to change the child's name, free of charge, once the father was present, as children needed to be registered as soon as possible in order to have access to services.

65. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that the Government needed to take concrete measures to increase the number of women in the judiciary and could encourage women to study the law by establishing scholarship schemes for women.

66. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that women should be able to register their children under the father's name even in the absence of the father, as changing the child's name at a later date would be time-consuming. The Committee would welcome data on birth registration and the length of delays.

67. **Ms. Patten** agreed that women should be able to register their children under the father's name, provided the child was born in wedlock. She asked whether the State party was considering temporary special measures to increase the number of female judges and ambassadors. Was the Government engaging with the private sector, given that it was accountable for discrimination in that sector?

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.